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ABSTRACT

Many graduate students feel they should play a subservient role within a professional association; however, as members of AECT (Association for Educational Communications and Technology), graduate students can contribute to growth and change in a rapidly evolving field in several ways. Many of the leaders of the profession came out of the lantern slide generation, while current students have grown up and matured in the computer generation; these students can introduce a fresh viewpoint and perspective to the field. Students are also in the best position to suggest alternatives to some traditions within the profession, and to require that all members examine the basic premises and assumptions upon which they operate. While challenging tradition, students can also recognize the basis and value of that tradition, ensuring that the profession will achieve an appropriate balance between residual elements of the past and the new dimensions of cutting-edge technologies. Graduate students can also add a spark of vitality to professional gatherings, enriching the wisdom of established members with open-minded enthusiasm. Finally, personal networks which are formed through professional affiliations will prove invaluable in career development; becoming involved in AECT will help in constructing a network of support for the future. (JB)

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Graduate Student Contributions to AECT and to the Future of Educational Technology

Paul W. Welliver

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A Summary of a Presentation for a Session entitled
Directions in Research, Instructional Development and Professional Activities for Graduate Students and Others

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It is a common and generally accepted feeling among many graduate students that they are newcomers to a profession and therefore they should be seen and not heard, sit obediently at the feet of experts to catch pearls of wisdom, and generally play a subservient role within a professional association. This perception is just not true of AECT!

This is not to deny that there is a great deal to gain from "rubbing elbows" with the scholars and leaders in the field by associating with them at AECT functions. These contacts should be approached, however, with the assurance that, as graduate students in a rapidly evolving field, you have a great deal to contribute to that growth and change. I will try to outline a few of the ways in which this can be done.

1. Introduce a fresh viewpoint and perspective.

You must be aware that you are growing up and maturing in the computer generation. Many of the established leaders in our field came out of the lantern slide generation. These two groups think differently. This is not to say that the elder generation hasn't developed some dramatic innovations and thoughtful insights. It is, however, to emphasize that you are able to pick up where they left off and approach instruction from a significantly different perspective.

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2. Challenge tradition

A lot of what has been done in education made good sense at the time and under the circumstances in which it was developed. A background, a foundation, a tradition are all necessay elements of a field. But they can not be permitted to dominate a field - particularly the one in which we work. You are in the best position to suggest alternatives to some of these traditions and require that all of us examine the basic premises and assumptions upon which we operate. Be prepared to fail and be wrong but don't let that inhibit you from venturing in new directions.

3. Provide a balance.

As you challenge tradition, recognize the basis and value of that tradition. In so doing, help the profession to achieve an appropriate balance between residual elements of the past, which continue to provide value, and the exciting new dimensions of cutting-edge technololgies. The concept of balance is important. Leaning too far in either direction often causes a system to topple and fall.

4. Provide vitality to the profession.

You, with your youth and new perspective, are in a unique position to add a spark of vitality to professional gatherings. This is not to imply that an assembly of mature professionals is necessarily dull. Indeed, quite to the contrary! But your seniors in this field are both enriched and inhibited by the past. You, unshackled by much of what came before, can enrich wisdom with openminded enthusiasm.

5. Get involved and serve.

Actually this is not primarily something that you can do for AECT and the profession. Rather, as you contribute your time and energy it is, in the long run, something that the profession can do for you. It is difficult for me to conceive of an individual being able to make significant progress professionally without this type of involvement. The personal relationships and networks that are achieved are invaluable as your career develops. I can not even estimate the number of times that I have needed

information or assistance when I have been able to pick up the telephone and call someone who I met through my professional involvement. The more involved you are, the more people that you meet and the more you develop that network of support. It is a very positive version of the old saying that it isn't what you know but who you know.

6. Develop a special network among other graduate students.

A few years ago a major effort was initiated to develop a network of graduate students. All graduate programs were contacted, a student representative was identified at each one, and a regular newsletter was circulated. Unfortunately, it was a time when AECT was absorbed in a lot of other priorities and the effort was abandoned after about a year. I think that the time is now right for such an project and would challenge you to initiate a graduate student network. I would be glad to provide some background from the past effort to assist in getting the idea underway. In fact, at one time it was even suggested that such a group might seek division status in AECT. One wag even proposed that it be known as the Division of Graduate Students or DOGS. He felt that it was an appropriate acronym in light of the life that he was leading in graduate school!

AECT has a tradition of planning activities which will bring together the experienced professional along with the younger newcomers to the field. You are the ones who provide one of those two important dimensions to our profession. I invite and urge you to capitalize on this significant professional role.